

From Macedonism to *Neo*-Macedonism: The Self-Identification of Alexander the Great

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A very popular belief amongst the Macedonian Slavs of the 19th century was that the ancient Macedonians were their ethno-genetic¹ ancestors. It is said that even distinguished Macedono-Bulgarian educators like Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov (1830–1962 & 1810–1962) believed that “not only Philip, Alexander and the Ancient Macedonians were Slavs, but also Homer, Demosthenes and Strabo” (Marinov, 2013, p. 385). In 1878, Giorgi Pulevski (1823–1893) — widely regarded as the “father” of Slavo-Macedonian nationhood and a pioneer of Macedonism (Friedman, 1986, p. 285; Rossos, 2008, p. 95; Koneski, 1961, p. 61; Pribichevich, 1982, p. 113) — was urging his countrymen to rise up and fight for Macedonia’s independence: “like our people under Alexander fought” (Koneski, 1961, p. 74). Pulevski’s beliefs *vis à vis* the ethno-genetic continuity between the Slavs of his time and the ancient Macedonians are best articulated in one of his poems:

“Have you, Macedonians, heard what old people say:
‘There have not been bolder people than the Macedonians.’
‘The Tsar Alexander the Macedonian, three hundred years before Christ’
‘Conquered the whole planet with the Macedonians’
Our King Philip is a Slav, the Tsar Alexander is a Slav
They have been given birth to by our Slavonic grandmothers”
(According to P. Draganov *Makedonsko-slavjanskij sbornik*,
pp. 233–4, as cited in Koneski, 1961, p. 75)

Unlike early Macedonism, *neo*-Macedonism categorically rejects suggestions of a Macedonian identity with Slavic roots. Instead, it asserts that *neo*-Macedonians² are the lineal descendants

¹ “Ethnogenetic” without a hyphen, pertains to “ethnogenesis”, while “ethno-genetic” pertains to “ethnos/ethnic” and “genetics”.

² The following paper employs the term “*neo*-Macedonians” when referring to non-Hellenic Macedonians. The aim is not to diminish or negate the Macedonianness or “ethnic groupness” of modern, non-Hellenic Macedonians, but, rather, to validate both by clearly demarcating the boundaries between the geographical term “Greek-Macedonian” and the ethnic and temporal term “*neo*-Macedonian”.

of the ancient Macedonians — a non-Slavic people with a distinct history, language, culture and homeland. This is the view, especially in the diaspora. As a result, there is a tendency to diminish the significance of the Slavs (Seraphinoff, 2007, pp. 1–5) and their impact on geographical Macedonia, by presenting their arrival in the Balkans as something that never really occurred or was, at best, a peripheral event (Curta as cited in Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 109); a hypothesis rather than a historical fact; not so much a flood as a trickle that did not significantly alter the genetic composition of the ancient Macedonians already living there (Najdovski, 2007, p. 23). Or as one writer has put it: “it has been shown, that the Macedonians are a unique nation, different from other Slav nations, and they have been this way for at least 3000 years” (Stefov, 2005, p. 40). Although there are writers who speak of the “admixture of the Ancient Macedonians and later the Slavs in Macedonia” (Dinev as cited in Sfetas, 2007, p. 294; Slaveska as cited in Lomonosov, 2012, p. 64; Stefov, 2005) they are primarily confined to Northern Macedonia and to its diasporas.

Neo-Macedonism is not so much about a modern political framework — a “Macedonia for Macedonians” — as it is about an ancient essence and validation. This is evident in its persistent preoccupation with myths of origin and links to Alexander the Great in particular. References to ancient Macedonia, its heroes and symbols, are embedded in cultural narratives, including within both the private and public representations of the *neo-Macedonian* identity. The lure and prestige of antiquity is central to the *neo-Macedonian* historico-cultural identity. It is, however, Alexander the Great, alone, who constitutes the nucleus of *neo-Macedonianness*. He is essential to the *neo-Macedonian* myth of origin.

Had Alexander the Great been born in Argos, “the land of his fathers” (*To Philip*, 32; *The Peloponnesian War*, 2.99.3, also 5.80; Arrian, *Indica*, 5.26.5), we would almost certainly be discussing the “Argive Question”. It is not Perdiccas I, Alexander I, Amyntas III or Philip II but Alexander who confers that animistic quality on Macedonia, its beguiling mysticism which is so prevalent in the historical, mythological and folkloric traditions we have inherited. In Alexander, both the spatial and the spiritual are wedded to each other in ways that captivate both the imagination and the ego. He is the myth and that which infuses the myth with vitality; one which is securely rooted in history and without whom Macedonia would be irrelevant. That is why he remains indispensable to any form of discourse on Macedonia, and why he appears in the literature of at least 80 nations (Wilcken, 1967, p. ix). If it were somehow possible for us to remove him from the equation, the whole edifice of the “Macedonian Question” would collapse and the discussion reduced to trade routes and tourist destinations.

Yet despite all the archaeological, literary and epigraphic evidence — including international scholarly consensus regarding his Hellenic self-identification — Alexander the Great has somehow come to represent the soul and impetus of *neo-Macedonian* historiography in the form of the “Macedonian” who has been “stolen” by the Greeks. The notion of descent from the ancient Macedonians — and specifically Alexander the Great — is not only widespread,

it is also an article of faith amongst *neo*-Macedonians around the world. This is particularly the case amongst the younger generations. To argue, as some have (Shea, 1997, p. 178; Borza, 1999, p. 255; Danforth, 2010, p. 581), that only the “most extreme nationalists” in the diasporas of Australia, Canada and America believe that they are descendants of the ancient Macedonians and Alexander the Great, is to purposely ignore the abundance of evidence to the contrary. In Australia, for instance, one need only look at the daily manifestations of *neo*-Macedonian culture which is replete with the ancient Macedonian Sunburst, Alexander the Great, Philip II, Cleopatra VII, the Macedonian Phalanx, even Aristotle.³ Online sites, printed material, festival brochures, banners and memorabilia, public and private discussions all testify to the fact that the notion of “ancientness” is an indispensable, non-negotiable criterion of *neo*-Macedonianness and that Alexander is a *neo*-Macedonian ancestor — genetically, culturally even linguistically (Stefov, 2005, p. 12). The immediate reaction to the rejection of such claims is that these constitute an inviolable part of one’s right to self-identification and that no one has the right to deny it.

Self-identification may indeed be one of the most sacrosanct human rights, but it also involves a historical responsibility towards others who may be adversely affected by its specific claims. And nowhere is *neo*-Macedonian contradictoriness more evident than in the invocation of one’s right to self-identification whilst simultaneously denying it to those with whom it supposedly self-identifies — namely Alexander the Great and Philip II and the ancient Macedonians. Particularly confounding is the identification with the Greek-identifying Alexander but not with his Greek values or world view. In other words, with the intrinsic, indispensable, even sacred, criteria of his self-identification, of his temperament. One would expect *neo*-Macedonianness to reject Alexander for the superfluity or ostentatiousness of his Greekness, so clearly recorded in history and folklore, rather than revere him for the remoteness or elusiveness of his supposed “Macedonianness”. It is clear that the shell or the appearance — rather than Alexander’s intrinsic essence, his Hellenic temperament — is more important to his *neo*-Macedonian claimants. In other words, semblance of historicity rather than *historicity* itself. It is important enough to entirely ignore the actual standards of Alexander’s self-identification, what makes him who he is, and posthumously impose upon him a revised, *neo*-Macedonised identity by virtue of the fact that a particular group urgently requires a narrative that legitimises its existence. Such a view goes to the very heart of *neo*-Macedonism’s ahistoricity but also the profound existential predicament it encapsulates — the stigma and quandary of modernness. In fact, the greatest challenge with *neo*-Macedonianness is its resistance to modernness itself, and this is a large part of the quandary. The *neo*-Macedonian refuses to be modern because antiquity alone confers

³ Canberra rally 28 October 2007. Left to right: Philip II, Cleopatra and Alexander the Great followed by Aristotle. Viewed 10 October 2017, AlaksandarsArmy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNDIW4HxzV8> (1:05 minutes).

authority to their claim. This is also where the claim to ancient Macedonia and the ancient Macedonians becomes problematic.

The absence of testimony or a convincing alternative account is a void *neo*-Macedonianness cannot explain. By accepting that there is in fact no ancient provenance, or narrative that connects Alexander, Philip and the ancient Macedonians to modern, non-Hellenic Macedonians, is to relinquish all claims to one of one of history's most glorious and coveted eras. It means to acknowledge the narrative of modernity with its shallow roots and entirely renounce one's "ancient Macedonian" identity. By doing so, the *neo*-Macedonian at once surrenders their claims, they revert to past nominal anathemas as "Bulgarians", "Serbs", "Yugoslavs" or "Slavs". For the average *neo*-Macedonian, this is a humiliating and intolerable proposition; for once accepted, they concede defeat. Their ancient narrative is, at once, reduced to one of historical inauthenticity and vacuousness. Nowhere has this fear been more clearly expressed than in a treatise originally published in *Glas na Makendoncite* (Voice of Macedonians) and reprinted in *Makedonija* newspaper, Melbourne, on 30 July–21 August 1986.

For almost three hundred years we have been taught under cruel circumstances that we are Sloveni — Macedonians are dead and we are different people — 'Macedonian Slavians' [...]. Slavism for us Macedonians is a deadly destructive political, moral and national force which aims to eradicate Macedonianism completely [...]. Politically, once we become Slavs we automatically lose any significance as descendants of the ancient Macedonians [...]. By calling ourselves Slavs we legalize this robbery by the Greeks [of the ancient Macedonians]. For us, Macedonian revolutionaries, Macedonianism gives wholeness to our being past, present, and future. It is inner liberation from foreign imposed ideas, and confidence in our ability to be what we have been and will again be [...]. If we remain silent, we will remain Slavs, and as Slavs, we have no legal right to anything Macedonian [...]. (Published in *Makedonija* Melbourne 30 July to 21 August 1986 as cited in Kofos, 1989, p. 267).

Unwilling to accept what they perceive as a constant encroachment on their right to self-identification, the *neo*-Macedonian has found a historical purpose and impetus in a reactionary, ahistorical stance. This involves depriving the "victor", i.e., the Greeks, of their historical monopoly, by continuously and publicly denying the legitimacy of the latter's narrative, thus providing the vanquished with a sense of satisfaction in denying their denier's supposed "specialness". If Alexander cannot possibly be a *neo*-Macedonian ancestor, then he must not be Greek. Satisfaction in rejection thus becomes empowering and therefore existentially validating. This is why negation, refusal, rejection, denial, have today become indispensable parts of *neo*-Macedonianness' modern arsenal in a crusade to save "Macedonia" and the "Macedonians", from their historical deniers whom they view as intent on forcing them into existential insignificance and oblivion. The result is a recourse to creative historiography because a *semblance* of truth is better than no truth at all.

In Australia, for example, this semblance of the truth is regularly on show at high profile festivals such as Moomba, Independence Day parades and community events where the

visitor is exposed to a *neo*-Macedonised version of ancient Macedonian history which makes absolutely no mention of Hellenism or Hellas. It is something that is further sustained by the reciprocal exchange of fantastical narratives and literature between *neo*-Macedonian diasporas such as Melbourne and Toronto in particular. Yet, despite almost all mythological, archaeological, historical, folkloric and scholarly evidence — even ridicule by both international and *neo*-Macedonian scholars, refutations by the first President of the FYROM⁴ a former prime minister⁵ and a Consul General⁶ to Canada — the average *neo*-Macedonian, both in the Republic of Northern Macedonia (formerly the FYROM) and the diaspora, continues to readily espouse creative historiography. In the case of Australia, the pervasion and persistence of ancient themes and ancient ethno-symbolism clearly indicates that these narratives are crucial to the *neo*-Macedonian-identity and self-esteem. Even more puzzling is how often they are considered genuine historiography and are espoused both locally by the media and, as seen, by some academics. One might have expected that in the face of such historical untenability, *neo*-Macedonism would have by now met its own humiliating demise. On the contrary, it is more virulent than ever. In Australia as in Canada *neo*-Macedonism has succeeded in elevating an artificial, if not outrageous, ethno-genetic narrative, which includes a myth of descent rooted in the ancient Macedonian past, to the level of actual historiography. The ancient Macedonians, Philip and Alexander in particular, have become anti if not mis-Hellenes. Fiction, however, cannot compete with the facts examined below.

Macedonian Ethnogenesis and Self-Identification

We are fortunate to have available to us a rich corpus of ancient works which offer both implicit and explicit insights into the self-identification of ancient Macedonians. Most of these works are by Greek and Roman writers (Engels, 2010, p. 82). In some respects, it is unfortunate that we do not possess an alternative, or strictly “Macedonian” perspective, which would have afforded us greater insight into the everyday lives of the average Macedonian, and hence into the various, contentious and conflicting modern claims on ancient Macedonianness.

⁴ In an interview to the *Toronto Star* (March 15, 1992), the first President of the Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov stated: “We are Macedonians but we are Slav-Macedonians. That is who we are! We have no connection to Alexander the Greek and his Macedonia. The ancient Macedonians no longer exist; they have disappeared from history a long time ago. Our ancestors came here in the fifth and sixth century AD” (Appendix 8).

⁵ In two interviews, former Prime Minister of the FYROM, Ljubco Georgievski, argues for the case of Macedonian Hellenism. He refutes claims of a “Macedonian” Alexander [that is a non-Hellenic one] and explains it as part of the FYROM’s cultural “theft” and questions the veracity of the *neo*-Macedonian narrative as well as its ultimate intentions (Dut888 2011; Energy 2014).

⁶ In February 1999, the Consul General of the FYROM, Gyordan Veselinov, made the following statement to the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper: “We are not related to the northern Greeks who produced leaders like Philip and Alexander the Great. We are a Slav people and our language is closely related to Bulgarian”, viewed 22 December 2017, <http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/ConciseMacedonia/MacedoniansNotSlavs.html>

However, as Borza has stated, “the Macedonians remain one of the mute peoples of antiquity” (1982, p. 24; see also, Engels, 2010, p. 89). They, along with Alexander the Great and Philip II, are therefore inevitably presented from what is essentially a Graeco-Roman perspective because that is where the evidence lies. Of course, the absence of evidence is not necessarily tantamount to it not existing. Some day there may be information that will challenge existing views on the subject. For the time being, we can only turn to what is available. The following discussion examines the self-identification of the ancient Macedonians and in particular that of Alexander the Great.

Homer, Hesiod, Hellenicus

What we nowadays consider mythology, constituted for the ancient Greeks an integral part of their actual ethnogenesis, theology and history. Zeus, Heracles, Achilles and others of the pantheon were extant and essential aspects of the Greeks’ cultural repository, their everyday lives, as well as their conception of the universe around them.⁷ It is in this light that one must therefore look upon ancient Greek mythology as genuinely historical events — actual biographies, rather than random and fantastical compositions. For example, the brothers Macedon and Magnes, the purported progenitors of the Macedonians and the Magnetes, examined below, were for all intents and purposes historical figures; their genesis and narratives belonged to history rather than to mythology. These were rooted in, and emerged out of, the primordial essence of the Greek gods and articulated through a Greek lexical medium within a Greek world.

Both Hesiod (c.700–600 BCE) and Homer (c.700–600 BCE) provide the earliest references to the linguistic, genealogical, ethnogenetic and territorial parameters of ancient Macedonia and Macedonianness. It is in Homer (*Odyssey*, 7:106) that we first encounter, what may be described as the earliest “linguistic imprint” or adumbration of Macedonianness, where the poet describes slaves working “busy as the leaves of a tall poplar tree” *Οἰά τε φύλλα μακεδνῆς*⁸ *αιγείροιο*.

According to Hesiod (as cited in Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *On the Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* [Loeb Classical Library 503, p. 49])

The region of Macedonia was named from Macedon, the son of Zeus and Thyia the daughter of Deucalion, as the poet Hesiod says [...] and she [Thyia] became pregnant and bore to Zeus who delights in the thunderbolt two sons, Magnes and Macedon who delighted in the battle-chariot, those who dwelt in the mansions around Pieria and Olympus (*Catalogue of Women*, fr. 7).

⁷ In the *Iliad*, for example, one finds Alexander’s heroes and purported ancestors like Zeus, Achilles and Heracles. It is therefore integral to the understanding of his values, obsessions, and most importantly, his Hellenic self-identification.

⁸ According to linguist George Babiniotes (2012, *Ancient Greek Dialects*, Lecture, Wright Lecture Theatre, Melbourne University, Australia), the term *μακεδνῆς* [makednés] means “tall” or “high” (Makedonians i.e., Highlanders). See also Borza (1990, pp. 95–97).

Hesiod's description also provides the original territorial limits of the brothers' *lebensraum* — “the mansions around Pieria and Olympus”.⁹ Both Macedon and Magnes¹⁰ are initially presented as grandsons of King Deucalion — son of Prometheus and father of Hellen, the eponymous ancestor of the Hellenes (Hall, 2002, p. 139) — who originally “ruled over Thessaly” (Hesiod, fr. 6).

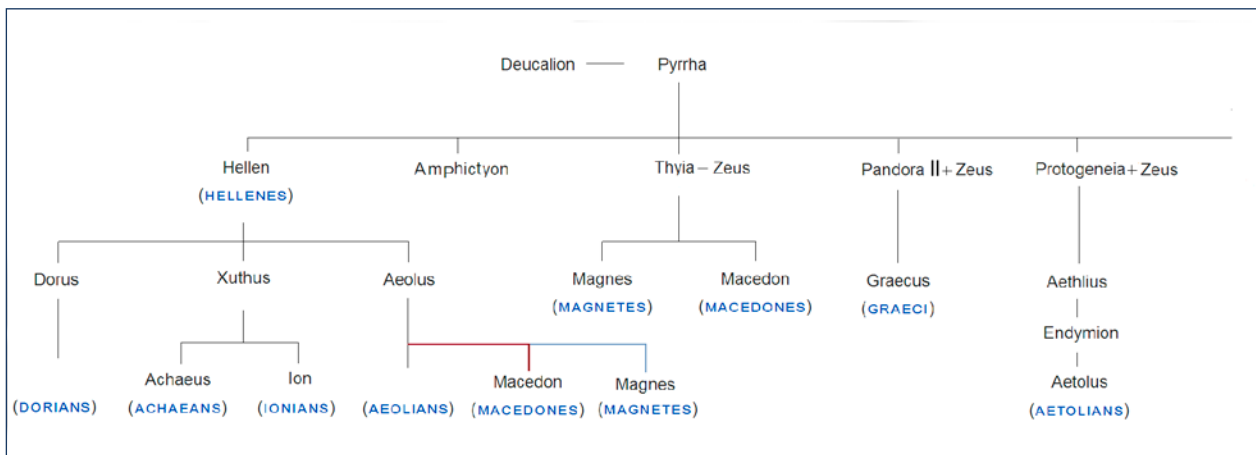


Figure 1:¹⁰ The genealogical relation between ancient Macedonians and early Greek tribes, based on West, M. L 1985, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins* Oxford (1985, p. 173)

According to a fragment from the fifth-century Greek historian Hellanicus' (490–BCE) work, *The Priestesses of Argos* (FGrH 4 F74, as cited in Hammond 1995, Vol. 2, p. 60; Engels, 2010 p. 90), Macedon is presented as the son of Aeolus and grandson of Hellen. In *Apollodorus Library*, 1.7.3), Magnes is also presented as the son of Aeolus.¹² Engels (2010, p. 90) tells us that “despite serious difference in their genealogies, both Hesiod and Hellanicus count the Macedonians among the Greek speaking-peoples and hence regard them as Greeks”.

The Macedonians like Magnetes and Aeolians are part of an extended Greek family and coexist within a contiguous, familial and territorial arrangement as determined by the same ethno-genetic process; this is why they are also grouped together geographically (Hammond, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 295). Yet again, Macedon and Magnes are confirmed as being brothers, only this time this brotherhood is clearly an extension of the Aeolian branch of the Greek nation. They are now presented as sons of Aeolus and first cousins of the Dorians, Ionians, Achaeans and Aeolians (figure 1).

⁹ See also Hammond 1992, p. 3.

¹⁰ Magnes, the progenitor of the Magnetes who are mentioned last in Homer's “Catalogue of Ships” in the *Iliad*: “And the Magnetes had as leader Prothous, son of Tenthredon. These were they who lived about the Peneius and Pelion” (2.756–760).

¹¹ Table adapted by D. Gonis so as to reflect Hellanicus and Apollodorus traditions of Magnes and Macedon.

¹² According to a much later tradition from the second century CE traveller Pausanias Magnes is also presented as the son of Aeolus (*Elis*, 2.21.11).

Herodotus

Herodotus (484–425 BCE) first mentions *Μακεδόνον*, Makednón, whilst describing an incident during which, Croesus the King of Lydia (595–547), asks to be told about the “mightiest amongst the Greeks whom he should ‘make his friends’” (*The Persian Wars*, 1.56). He is told of the “Lacedaemonians, among those of Doric, and the Athenians among those of Ionic stock”. Herodotus also informs us that it was during Deucalion’s reign that the Hellenes:

Inhabited the land of Phthia [contiguous to Magnesia], then in the time of Dorus son of Hellen the country called Histiaean,¹³ under Ossa and Olympus; driven by the Cadmeans¹⁴ from this Histiaean country settled about the Pindus in the parts called *Macednian* [Macedonian].

Apart from being the earliest historian to clearly place the Macedonians within the Hellenic race, Herodotus also offers a narrative regarding their arrival on the scene. Although more likely fictitious, it appears to have been regularly cited around the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE by historians and orators alike: “Now these descendants of Perdiccas are Greeks as *they themselves say* [italics, Gonis], I myself chance to know” (Herodotus, *ibid.*, 5.22). And so that there is absolutely no doubt as to what he means, Herodotus emphasises the fact that according to his knowledge this has been adjudicated by the highest authority on Greekness — that of the *Hellenodicae* of the Olympic Games: “and further, the *Hellenodicae* who have the ordering of the contest at the Olympic Games determined that it is so” (*ibid.*). He then specifically refers to the case of Alexander I, who after demonstrating his Argive descent, and was judged to be a Hellene, was permitted to compete in the furlong race in which he “ran a dead heat for the first place.”¹⁵ Thus we have the establishment but also legitimation of the Argive Macedonian tradition.¹⁶

Herodotus offers further details about the background of “these Greek descendants of Perdiccas” during another incident, where Alexander I is sent to deliver Mardonius’ ultimatum to the Athenians.¹⁷ It is here that he also provides a more specific account of Alexander’s genealogy, describing the trials, tribulations, and ultimate migration of his ancestors — the three brothers Gauanes, Aeropus and Perdiccas — from “the lineage of Temenus”.¹⁸ Herodotus informs us that these brothers were banished from Argos in the Peloponnese only to end up in a “part of Macedonia [...] called the garden of Midas son of Gordias”.¹⁹ Led by Perdiccas

¹³ North-western Euboea, Greece.

¹⁴ From Cadmus, the first king of Thebes (Apollodorus, *Library*, 3:4).

¹⁵ According to Badian, “no Macedonian appears on the lists of Olympic victors that have survived until well into the reign of Alexander the Great” (1982, p. 36). Although this is a significant point is self-identification, that is our focus here — the fact that Alexander I is accepted as a Greek after affirming his Greekness.

¹⁶ Herodotus also informs us of a golden statue of Alexander I that stood at Delphi (8.121).

¹⁷ Demosthenes refers to this episode in the *Second Philippic*, 8–11.

¹⁸ Temenus was the king of Argos and great grandson of Heracles (Apollodorus, *The Library*, 2.8.2).

¹⁹ Édessa (Herodotus, 1925, p. 144).



Figure 2: Tomb of Darius the Great, Mount Behistun, *Naqs-e-Rustam*, Iran, depicting the ancient Macedonians they subsequently “subdued also the rest of Macedonia” (Herodotus, *ibid.*, 8.137–138). According to Badian (1982, p. 34), Thucydides (460–400) also accepted the above narrative of Macedonian Argive descent “as canonical”, corroborating the narrative that in the fifth century BCE, the tradition *vis-à-vis* the Argive origins of the Macedonians was considered factual:

But the country by the sea which is now called Macedonia, was first acquired and made their kingdom by Alexander, the father of Perdiccas, and his forefathers who were originally Temenids from Argos (*The Peloponnesian War*, 2.99.3, also 5.80).

A later narrative in Strabo (*Geography*, 7, fr.11) also corroborates the myth of Macedonian descent claiming that it was from Macedon “one of its earliest chieftains” that the region Macedonia acquired its name, including the people who later settled there — the Macedonians. Strabo is also the one who makes that famous declaration: “Macedonia, of course, is a part of Greece” (*ibid.*, 7, fr. 9). Although a moot statement its significance lies, not in its inference that Macedonia “belongs” to Greece, but that Macedonia is part of the concept of Greece, of Hellas.

The Persian View: “The Greeks who Wear their Shields on their Heads”

The oldest exo-Helladic reference to the identity of the ancient Macedonians can be found in the cuneiform inscriptions on the tomb of Darius I (c.522–486) at *Naqsch-i-Rustam*²⁰ in

²⁰ *Naqsch-i-Rustam* is a necropolis situated 13 kilometres from Persepolis, Iran: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Persepolis#ref31169>



Figure 3: Tomb of Darius the Great, close up of *Yauna Takabara*, ancient Macedonians, No. 26, http://www.realhistoryww.com/world_history/ancient/Misc/Elam/Persepolis.htm

Persia. Hewn into one of Mt Behistun's cliffs is a late sixth to early fifth BCE inscription (Rollinger, 2006, pp. 203–206), including a depiction in relief, of Darius the Great's throne-bearing subject nations. Among these nations, one finds the *Yauna* (Persian for Ionians/Greeks) as well as the *Yauna Takabara*²¹ “Ionians with hats that look like shields” or “Ionians who wear their shields on their heads” (figure 26, of throne bearers, left to right, top to bottom) — an allusion to the Macedonian sun-visor, the *kaufsia* (Engels, 2010, p. 87; Olbrycht, 2010, p. 344; Hammond, 1992, p. 12; Lane Fox).

This state of affairs between the Persians and the ancient Macedonians, lords and vassals, is also attested to by Herodotus (5.17–18), where representatives of Darius I (550–486 BCE) demand tribute, “earth and water”, from King Amyntas I (540–498 BCE). It is during this visit by the Persians that Alexander I (498–454 BCE) refers to King Amyntas as Darius' “Greek viceroy of Macedonia” *ανήρ Ἑλλην Μακεδόνων ὑπαρχος* (ibid., 5. 20). However, it is during a later episode, that Alexander's sense of kinship with the southern Hellenes is more clearly expressed. It is just before the *Battle of Plataea* that he feels compelled to warn²² those he considers his kin, of Mardonius' impending dawn attack. Herodotus describes how with his life in danger and riding under cover of darkness, Alexander enters the Athenian camp to warn them. It is here that Herodotus presents him as saying: “I would not tell it to you were it not by good reason [...] for I myself am of ancient Greek descent, [Ἑλλην γένος εἰμί] and would not willingly see Hellas change her freedom for slavery” (9.45). The episode concludes with Alexander asking the Athenians to save him from the certain slavery that is to befall him in the event of a Persian defeat because of his action taken in the “cause of Hellas [...] so the *barbarians*²³ may not fall upon you suddenly” (ibid.). Alexander's last

²¹ See “Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions, DNe, Indications of People” for enumeration of nations: <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/achaemenid-royal-inscriptions/>

²² This is the second time Alexander has warned the Athenians (Herodotus, 7.173).

²³ The original Loeb translation is “foreigners”. The original Greek text however gives the word barbarians, *βάρβαροι*, something that totally changes the dynamics of the sentence. Considering the significance of the

statement regarding the barbarians is crucial. Not only does he declare he is a Hellene, but he also implicitly emphasises it by referring to the Persians as “barbarians”. More importantly, there is no indication that it is being rejected by those to whom it is being declared under very difficult circumstances. They don’t ignore but act on his advice.

That such a tradition, *vis-à-vis* Macedonian “Greekness” existed around the fifth century BCE, may also be inferred from another excerpt from Herodotus who, referring to the Persians says “their intent being, to subdue as many of the Greek cities as they could, first their fleet subdued the Thasians [...] and next, their land army added the Macedonians to the slaves they had already” (6.44). However, it is the purported words of Mardonius that leave little doubt about his perception of ancient Macedonians. Whilst speaking to King Xerxes, Mardonius refers to the Ionians who dwell in Europe, but specifically mentions Macedonia and then Athens. He refers to their manner of fighting and to their wealth. He then proceeds to point out that during the reign of Xerxes’ father, Darius I, he had marched against the Greeks:

As far as Macedonia and wellnigh to Athens itself, yet none came about to meet me in battle. Yet wars the Greeks do wage [...]. The Greek custom then is no good one; and when I marched as far as the land of Macedonia, it came not into their thoughts to fight (ibid., 7.9).

Mardonius’ references to Greeks and Macedonia together, but not Macedonians within the same context, implies an identification of one with the other, reinforcing the Persian view of Macedonians falling within the collective category of Hellenes. The Macedonians have a “Greek custom”. The fact that the descendants of Perdiccas I — including Alexander I — are presented as Hellenes, is of course extremely important. Not so much because they “are Hellenes” or of “Hellenic blood”, but because they self-identify, and are also seen by outsiders like Mardonius, as Hellenes or people with “Greek customs”. Herodotus also makes it very clear that it is not *he* who is claiming they are Hellenes. He is merely stating that he is aware, by way of tradition or personal investigation, of their own claim to Greekness “*as they themselves say*”. He clearly disassociates himself from the actual claim because he is going by tradition.

Philip II (382–336 BCE)

It is out of this ancient ethnogenetic, spatial, historical, and political context that Philip II and later Alexander the Great emerge as panhellenists. Even though there are fewer statements regarding Philip’s Greek self-identification, they do exist. The most unequivocal of these can be found in his letter to the Athenian senate, in which he expresses his grievances

term “barbarians”, Alexander I is making a very clear distinction between the Greeks and himself, and the “barbarian” Persians.

at the latter's disregard, for their mutual oaths and agreements, by urging the king of Persia to declare war on him:

This is the most amazing exploit of all; for, before the king reduced Egypt and Phoenicia, you passed a decree *calling on me to make common cause with the rest of the Greeks* against him, in case he attempted to interfere with us [...]. (Demosthenes, *Orations*, Philip's Letter).

While there are certainly indications that during Philip's time, some southern Hellenes considered him a Hellene, others did not. The most famous, and much-cited, anti-Macedonian tirade is Demosthenes':

Philip and his present conduct, though he is not only no Greek, nor related to the Greeks, but *not even a barbarian* [italics, Gonis] from any place that can be named with honour, but a pestilent knave from Macedonia, where it was never yet possible to buy a decent slave (*Third Philippic*, 31).

The above seems more like a personal attack on Philip's character rather than his Greekness. Philip isn't "even a barbarian", from a place that "it was never yet possible to buy a decent slave". Demosthenes despises Philip and he despises Macedonia for its increasing power and encroachment on the once-mighty Athenian Empire.²⁴ Isocrates (436–338 BCE) on the other hand indicates that by the middle of the fourth century BCE the tradition *vis-à-vis* the Hellenic roots of the Macedonians and indeed Phillip II was well established. In his *Address to Philip*, written in 346 BCE (Norlin, 1928, p. 244), he not only hails Philip II as a Hellene but extols him, "you beyond any of the Hellenes" (*To Philip*, 15). He also corroborates the Argive tradition of the Macedonians: "Argos is the land of your fathers" (*To Philip*, 32). Elsewhere, he refers to Philip as a "descendant of Heracles" (*To Philip*, 76) as well as "a man of the blood of Hellas" (*To Philip*, 139). These are significant statements, albeit questionable because of the political context. It is Isocrates, however, who will also make that very moot statement about Philip being the only one "among the Hellenes [who] did not claim the right to rule over a people of kindred race" (*To Philip*, 108). It is possible that Isocrates had the everyday Macedonian in mind whose western Doric dialect (Engels, 2010, p. 95) was unintelligible to most of the southern Hellenes and therefore appeared "*barbarian*".

Aeschines (389–314 BCE) also implicitly corroborates the tradition *vis-à-vis* Philip II Greekness. Referring to a congress,²⁵ he tells us that:

For at the congress of the Lacedemonian allies and the other Greeks, in which Amyntas III (–370 BCE), the father of Philip [II], being entitled to a seat was represented by a delegate whose vote

²⁴ It is said, that when he heard of Philip's death he "put on prodigious airs and caused a shrine to be dedicated to Pausanias" (Philip's assassin) and "offered sacrifice and thanksgiving for the good news" (Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon*, 1988, pp. 160–161). Another reference to Macedonian "barbarism" is that by Thracymachus of Chalcedon in his speech *For the Larissaeans*, where he refers to King Archelaus of Macedonia (grandson of Alexander I) as a barbarian by whom the Larissaeans, as Greeks, will not be subjugated (Dascalakis, 1965, p. 228).

²⁵ Congress of Sparta, 371 BCE (Aeschines, 1988, p. 185).

was absolutely under his [Amyntas'] control, he [the delegate] joined the *other* Greeks in voting to help Athens to recover possession of Amphipolis (*On the Embassy*, 32).

Amyntas' proxy does not join the Greeks, but the "other Greeks" implying that there is only one ethnic group here and, as a representative of a Greek, he too joins them.

By the end of Philip's life, his panhellenism was well established. He was, for all intents and purposes a Hellene. He presided over the Pythian Games and the "common festivals of the Greeks" (Demosthenes, *Third Philippic*, 32), took part in the 356 BCE Olympics (Hammond, 1967, p. 534) and according to Plutarch (46-c.122 CE [*Lives, Alexander*, 4.5]) — as well as the existing material evidence — had "the victories of his chariots at Olympia engraved upon his coins" (figure 4).



Figure 4: Gold coins depicting victory of Philip II's horses at the Olympic Games in 356 BCE. Viewed 14 September 2017, <https://coinweek.com/ancient-coins/coinweek-ancient-coin-series-horses-ancient-coins/>

This was not only numismatic advertising of his victory, but also an affirmation of his place within the Hellenic family. Following his victory at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE), he erected a circular building, the Philippeum, in the quintessential Hellenic forum, ancient Olympia (figure 5). Within it he placed a statue of himself, of his father Amyntas, of his son Alexander the Great, as well as statues/portraits of his wife Olympias and mother Eurydice (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Elis I, 17.1; 20.9–10). The political undertones of such an action cannot be totally dismissed, as Philip was a shrewd politician. The incorporation of so many family members, however, speaks to a need to be genuinely regarded as Greek. Even though the narrative of their supposed origins "may have had no more basis than a verbal echo, the kings considered themselves to be of Greek descent from Heracles, son of Zeus" (Hammond, 1967, p. 534).

Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE)

Any doubts about Philip's Hellenic identity did not apply to Alexander. By the time he rose to the throne at twenty (336 BCE), several generations of his family had already



Figure 5: The Philippeion today. Viewed 25 November 2017

<http://documents-macedon.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/the-philippeion-ancient-olympia.html>

self-identified as Hellenes, and representations of his grandfather, grandmother, father, mother and of himself were already housed in the Philippeion in Olympia (Schultz as cited in Palagia, 2010, p. 37).²⁶ Writers like Badian (1982) have argued that Philip's panhellenism was a purely political decision; that it was empire alone that drove his conquests, rather than the enthralling lure of a supposed noble, Hellenic ideal and cause. If true, this still does not explain the Hellenic self-identification of his ancestors. The works that history, as well as folklore, has bequeathed to us, paint a picture of an Alexander who was thoroughly immersed in his Hellenic identity and Hellenising mission. For him, the narrative of his ancient and royal Hellenic lineage was all-consuming and unquestionable. This is from the outset evident in the manner with which he espouses, defends, and applies the Herodotean criteria of (Greek) nationhood or ethnic groupness. Ultimately, Alexander avenges Hellas

²⁶ "Careful examination of the materials and techniques of the statues' pedestal and the fabric of the tholos by Peter Schultz, however, has established that the entire monument was built in one phase and must have been completed in Philip's lifetime" (Palagia, 2010, p. 37).

because he genuinely laments “the burning and destruction of the adornments and temples of our gods” who he is “constrained to avenge to the uttermost.” He believes in:

The kinship of all the Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of the gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life [...] (Herodotus, 8.144).

Alexander’s pursuit and punishment of the Persians for wrongs inflicted on the Greeks and their temples is perhaps not sufficient proof of his Hellenism. One could, on the face of it, argue that such a pursuit was, like that of his father’s, a matter of political expediency, a very convincing façade. However, Alexander’s actions reveal he truly believes in what he is doing. He disseminates the Hellenic language and way of life, builds shrines to Hellenic gods and extols the virtues of Hellas and Hellenic culture. For Alexander, the Hellene is the human being *par excellence*, and *his* purported divine lineages make *him* the ideal candidate for the promotion and dissemination of such a world view. Regardless of what his “actual” ethno-genetic makeup may or may not have been, Alexander was, according to the majority of historians, geographers, folklorists, someone who self-identified as a Hellene. As a pan-hellenist of the first order, he was more committed to Hellas than any of the politicians in Athens or Sparta, and embodied the mythological, historical, and cultural parameters of the Hellenic identity in his time.

Alexander and the Macedonians in the Hellenistic Period and in Folklore

Writers from the Hellenistic period, both Greek and Roman are much more explicit about the self-identification of Alexander the Great and the identity of the ancient Macedonians. From the *Histories* of Polybius (200–118 BCE) to the folkloric account of Pseudo-Callisthenes²⁷ *The Life of Alexander of Macedon* (Haight, 1955), Alexander is presented, either directly or indirectly, as self-identifying as a Hellene. His world is one inhabited by Hellenic gods and heroes within a landscape which is animated by Hellenic notions of beauty and civility. Writers from the late Hellenistic period, to the early Roman Empire era, draw a picture of an Alexander who enters history as a Hellene. From the moment he is born, he is inculcated with the myth of his divine lineage. Diodorus (c. 1st century BCE) tells us that:

On his father’s side Alexander was a descendant of Heracles and from his mother’s side he could claim the blood of the Aeacides²⁸ so that from his ancestors on both sides he inherited the physical and moral qualities of greatness (Diodorus, *Library of History*, 17.1.5).²⁹

²⁷ Purported author of a pseudo-historical account or “historical romance” containing myths blended in with historical events from the life of Alexander the Great (Haight, 1955, p. 2).

²⁸ According to Hammond (1992, p. 16) “The royal house of the Molossian ethnos ruled from the time of Neoptolemus, son of Achilles (Strabo, 7.7.8), until the abolition of the monarch in 232 BCE, a span of nine centuries. Its members were called ‘Aeacidae’, descendants of Aeacus, the grandfather of Achilles.”

²⁹ Velleius Paterculus, 1.6.4; Arrian, *Anabasis*, 2.5.9; 4.11.6–9; Justin, 11.4.4–5.

We have a similar account by Marcus Velleius Paterculus (c. 19 BC–c. AD 31):

Alexander the Great [...] could boast that, on his mother's side he was descended from Achilles and on his father's side, from Hercules (*Compendium of Roman History*, 1.6.5).

Hellenistic sources present an Alexander who believes he is of the same vintage as Heracles and Achilles, from the line of the immortal Zeus (Plutarch, *Lives*, 33.1). These notions are very real to him, not mythopoeia. The world of his youth and adulthood is animated by the epics of Homer (Strabo, *Geography*, 13.1.27). He keeps the *Iliad* along with his dagger, under his pillow (Plutarch, *Lives*, 8.2) and later in Darius' golden coffer (Plutarch, *Lives*, 26.1). He is constantly guided by the heroes of his Hellenic education and upbringing. Heracles, Achilles, Perseus and Zeus constitute the measure of his strength and ultimate potential. More importantly, he not only aims at rivalling (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 3.3.2) but in fact, surpassing them in heroism and renown (Hammond, 1997, p. 7). Upon his arrival in Troy, he visits the tombs of his heroes Achilles and Ajax and honours them with offerings (Diodorus, *Library of History*, 17.17.3). Alexander speaking to Diogenes the Cynic he declares: "Forgive me that I imitate Heracles and emulate Perseus" (Plutarch, *Moralia*, 4.332). When he performs sacrifices, he does so in their honour (Plutarch, *Lives*, 15.4; Diodorus, *Library of History*, 17.3) as though he coalesces with their divine and heroic essence. Whilst trying to inspire his dispirited army, he not only speaks of the sacrifices that great deeds require but of his purported Peloponnesian ancestors:

Or do you not know that it was not by remaining in Tyrins or Argos or even in the Peloponnese or Thebes that our [Alexander's family] ancestor attained such renown that from a man he became, or was held, a god? Even Dionysus, a more delicate god than Heracles, had not a few labours to perform (Arrian, *Indica*, 5.26.5).

As king, the first of his objectives is to punish the Persians for their "impiety against the Greeks" (Polybius, *The Histories*, 5.10; Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 4.1.11). In Arrian, generally considered the most reliable source on Alexander, he sends a letter to Darius telling him: "Your ancestors invaded Macedonia and the rest of Greece" (*Anabasis*, 2.14.4). He does not separate Macedonia from Greece but presents it as an extension of Greece as Strabo says "part of Greece". The avenging of Greece is an objective he has made clear from the very beginning of his reign. This is also conveyed in one of the most poignant references in Alexander historiography, where he purportedly speaks to a felled statue of Xerxes in Persepolis: "Shall I pass on and leave thee lying there because of thine expedition against the Hellenes? (Plutarch, *Lives*, 37.3)."³⁰ His statements and deeds are consistent and unambiguous; they come from one who is deeply cognisant of the gravity of his mission as a Hellene.

³⁰ The notion of an Alexander who has been chosen as the "avenger of Greece" is also found in Justin's (c. second century CE) work, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogos* (1994, book 11:5.6; 11:14.11).

Alexander does not avenge Macedon but Hellas. He does not advance a “Macedonian” but a Hellenic world view. The medium may indeed be the might of the Macedonian army, but it is always in the cause of Hellas and the Hellenes. His aim, as he himself declares, is “to push the bounds of Macedonia to the farthest ocean and to disseminate and shower the blessings of Greek justice and peace over every nation” (Plutarch, *Moralia*, Vol. 4.332.10). Alexander may physically and politically originate from Macedon but spiritually resides in a Hellas that transcends the Helladic terrain. He is in the truest sense a missionary of Isocrates’ “Hellenic intelligence” (*Panegyricus*, 50)³¹ which he feels compelled to share, indeed impose, if need be, on the rest of humankind as a matter of utmost urgency and importance. He founds Greek cities (Plutarch, *Lives, Alexander*, 26.2) and Hellenises barbarian boys (Plutarch, *Lives*, 47.3). These are not ephemeral preoccupations or whims of youth. Unlike the common man, he lives for his destiny. He has no interest in family and children (Diodorus, *Library of History*, 17.16.2).

Alexander’s Hellenism also extends to more subtle aspects, such as the attire of his exhausted and forlorn men “whose arms and armour were wearing out and Greek clothing was quite gone” (Diodorus, *Library of History*, 17.94.2). Speaking to his men, he declares: “Do not the Greeks appear to you to walk among the Macedonians like demi-gods amongst wild beasts?” (Plutarch, *Lives*, 51.2). Alexander’s intention here is not so much to denigrate his fellow Macedonians but to extol the notion of “Greekness” which he clearly holds higher than any supposed “Macedonianness”. He calls a meeting of his generals, most of whom are from Macedonia, only to announce that “no city was more mischievous to the Greeks than the seat [Persepolis] of the ancient kings of Persia” (Curtius, *History of Alexander*, 5.6.1). Elsewhere he declares:

‘We Macedonians,’ he continued, ‘are to fight Medes and Persians [...]. Above all, it will be a fight of free men against slaves. And so far as Greek will meet Greek, they will not be fighting for like causes; those with Darius will be risking their lives for pay, and poor pay too; the Greeks on our side will fight as volunteers in the cause of Greece’ (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 2.7.4).³²

That Alexander’s Greekness is not something of a political facade, or banal obsession devoid of substance, is also evident in the way in which he defends the honour of the Greek way of life and name. When the wife of the Bactrian noble Spitamenes, a deserter, appears

³¹ “And so far has our city distanced the rest of mankind in thought and in speech that her pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world; and she has brought it about that the name ‘Hellenes’ suggests no longer a race, but an intelligence, and that the title ‘Hellenes’ is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share common blood” (Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 50–51).

³² One has to ask why Alexander makes these statements. Why does he so quickly presume that his Macedonian generals will be as offended as the southern Hellene officers amongst them, if the former did not also see themselves as Greeks? The same applies to the second excerpt where he is trying to inspire his men. Why does he attempt to do so by invoking the Greeks and Greece, when most of his men are “Macedonians”?

with the latter's head Alexander is repelled by the barbarity of the crime. Even though he has eliminated a "treacherous deserter", he does not want the woman "affecting the character and the mild dispositions of the Greeks by this example of barbarian lawlessness" (Curtius, *History of Alexander*, 8.3.15). He immediately orders her away from the camp, distancing himself from such conduct which he views as unbecoming to his civilised Greek upbringing and values.

Both the historical and folkloric sources of the Hellenistic Period paint a similar picture. The Macedonians of this period are understood to be a Greek people and Macedonia a "Greek land". We see this in a passage from Polybius and one in Livy. Speaking before the Lacedaemonian senate, Lyciscus the Acarnanian a supporter of Philip V (238–179 BCE) declares to Chlaeneas the Aetolian, a supporter of a Graeco-Roman coalition against Philip:

Then your rivals in the struggle for supremacy and renown were the Achaeans and Macedonians, peoples of your own race [...] (Polybius, *The Histories*, 9.37.7).

The above is also corroborated during a treaty between Hannibal and King Philip V of Macedon:

In the presence of all the gods who possess Macedonia and the rest of Greece [...]. That King Philip and the Macedonians and the rest of the Greeks who are their allies shall protect the Carthaginians (ibid., 7. 9.3–5).

Writing in the first century BCE, Livy (64 BCE–17 CE) tells us:

Aetolians, Acarnanians and Macedonians, peoples sharing a common language, are driven apart and united by trivial and transient issues; but all Greeks are ever, and ever will be, at war with foreigners, with barbarians (*The Dawn of the Roman Empire*, 31.29).

As for the Peloponnesian descent of the Macedonians, this is by the late first century CE well-established. Not only do the Macedonians claim to be Argives, but the Argives actually claim them as their descendants. "As for the Argives, apart from their belief that the Macedonian kings were descended from them" (Livy, 32.22–23).

The folkloric tradition also constitutes an important source of information on the self-identification of Alexander the Great. This has come down to us in the form of various "*Alexander Romances*", attributed to the imaginary writer Pseudo-Callisthenes (Haight, 1955; Wolo-hojian, 1969)³³ and rich in the "lore of the Hellenistic Age" (Haight, 1955, p. ix). Elizabeth Haight³⁴ has described them as a "historical romances" due to the amount of actual history

³³ Haight (1955, pp. 2–3) tells us that "the original Callisthenes was a nephew and pupil of Aristotle who wrote *Hellenica* in ten books and a work on the Deeds of Alexander. Alexander took him into Asia [...]. The name Callisthenes appears in connection with this romance only in certain manuscripts of the third class. The author's identity cannot be ascertained".

³⁴ Haight was the first scholar to translate the "romances" from Greek to English.

that they contain. She also claims “there are indications that an earlier version was written shortly after Alexander’s death” (1955, p. 2).

As the one of historiography, Pseudo-Callisthenes’ Alexander is an unequivocally Hellenic being (Haight, 1955, p. 67, Wolohojian 1969, pp. 45–46). So much so, that even Demosthenes, Philip’s arch-enemy, is somewhat ironically presented as affirming the latter’s Greekness: “Alexander, a Greek, and leading Greeks” (Haight *ibid.*, p. 68). In another instance, Alexander is referred to as the “first of the Greek kings to overcome Egypt” (Haight *ibid.*, pp. 68–69).³⁵ Yet it is not only others who affirm Alexander’s Greekness. Alexander also tells King Porus: “Since then the Greeks do not have these and you the barbarians do have them, we the Greeks, desiring better possessions, have come to take them from you” (Haight *ibid.*, p. 98).

The most salient characteristics of the folkloric tradition are its animistic character and pervasive Greekness. We are presented with a universe that is alive and interacts with Alexander in Greek. There are birds with human faces that speak to Alexander “in Greek” (Stoneman, 1991, p. 121); “when the moon rose, its tree spoke to him in Greek” (*ibid.*, p. 135). This constant repetition of Greekness and an obvious emphasis on the Greek language are very significant in that they qualify the hero; they tell us who he is and which things are important to him. They are, however, not only characteristics of the folkloric tradition. In Plutarch, a spring “casts forth a bronze tablet bearing the prints of ancient letters in which it is made known that the Persians will be destroyed by the Greeks” (*Lives, Alexander*, 17.2–3). In his *Jewish Antiquities* (11.337), the historian Flavius Josephus (30–100 CE) describes Alexander’s mythical visit to Jerusalem. When Alexander is purportedly shown a prophecy in the *Book of Daniel* — predicting that “one of the Greeks will destroy the Empire of the Persians” — he immediately interprets it as referring to him.

Although incidents such as the latter belong to mythology rather than history, they, in conjunction with historiography, offer us insights into popular perceptions about Alexander’s belief system and how he self-identified. The one constant is his Greekness. He self-identifies and is identified by others as a Hellene.

Conclusion

Unlike the more numerous, as well as more detailed writings from the Hellenistic period, we do not possess enough information to conclusively establish the exact relationship between the ancient Macedonians and the southern Hellenes of the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The sources from this period also tell us very little about the average ancient Macedonian man or woman. That said, the extant evidence paints a picture of a group somewhat on

³⁵ Strangely enough it is Demosthenes who in the historical account refuses Philip divine honours yet here suggests they send Alexander a crown of victory and congratulations (Stoneman, 1991, p. 92).



The Gate of All Nations, Persepolis

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gate_of_All_Nations,_Persepolis.jpg

the periphery of the Hellenic world, whose royal house clearly self-identified as Hellenes and had an established Hellenic tradition of origin. This is evident in Herodotus' Macedonian genealogy, in the declarations of Alexander I, and in the epigraphic evidence of the ancient Persians. We have also seen this in the Hellenistic literature and in the folkloric tradition. The fact that there is a certain blurriness from time to time — in the ambiguous statements of individuals like Isocrates or in Demosthenes' virulent attacks on Philip “the barbarian” has long been a point of contention amongst historians, but it is not enough to de-Hellenise Philip II, and certainly not Alexander the Great. What these conflicting statements tell us is that in the fourth century BCE, there existed a “discussion” around what it meant to be a “Hellene” and that the ancient Macedonians were clearly part of it. What the term “Hellene” exactly connoted, and how close that notion is to the notion of a Hellene today is part of a very different discussion.

The Helladic terrain along with the Hellene has undergone significant changes and claims to identity on an ethno-genetic basis are therefore futile. One is not a Hellene because “Hellenic” blood runs in their veins, but because they espouse Hellenic, historico-cultural values experienced within a common terrain by a particular group of people. Likewise, a “Macedonian” is not he or she who supposedly shares the “blood” of Alexander, but his vision, his

values, his temperament, his religion and mythology. Those things that constitute the pillars of his biotheory and self-identification.

What is undeniable is that the ancient Macedonians came into existence at the same time as their southern Hellenic kin. They emerged from the same mythological, ethnogenetic, and historical traditions, as essential and integral parts of Hellenic ethnogenesis. Macedonian ethnogenesis presupposes southern Hellenic ethnogenesis and *vice versa*. In the case of Alexander the Great, the extant mythological, historical, folkloric evidence demonstrates that regardless of where *neo*-Macedonist discourse seeks to position him, he positioned himself squarely within the Greek world as a descendant of Hellenic deities and demi-gods, defender and lover of Hellas and a Hellene *par excellence*. Nowhere in any of the literature is there a renunciation of his “Hellenism” or Hellas. In fact, one could infer from some of the above excerpts that there is a noticeable “back seating” of his Macedonianness and a manifest promotion of his Hellenism. One is therefore ethically, but also evidentially, bound not only to respect it but to also adopt it as a compass for such investigations. The picture of the “Macedonian” usurped by the Greeks, the anti-Hellene is simply not consistent with history, mythology or folklore.



Greek ancient like plaque at Alexander the Great monument in Thessaloniki (Source: Adobe Stock)

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